

Dive In: Finding Freedom – The Early Life of Saint John Paul II

Growing up in twentieth-century Poland wasn't easy. Karol Wojtyła (St. Pope John Paul II) was all too familiar with dictators and oppressive governments. When he was in high school, the Nazis took over his homeland. When he was in seminary, communists took over his homeland. He knew what it meant to have freedom taken away.

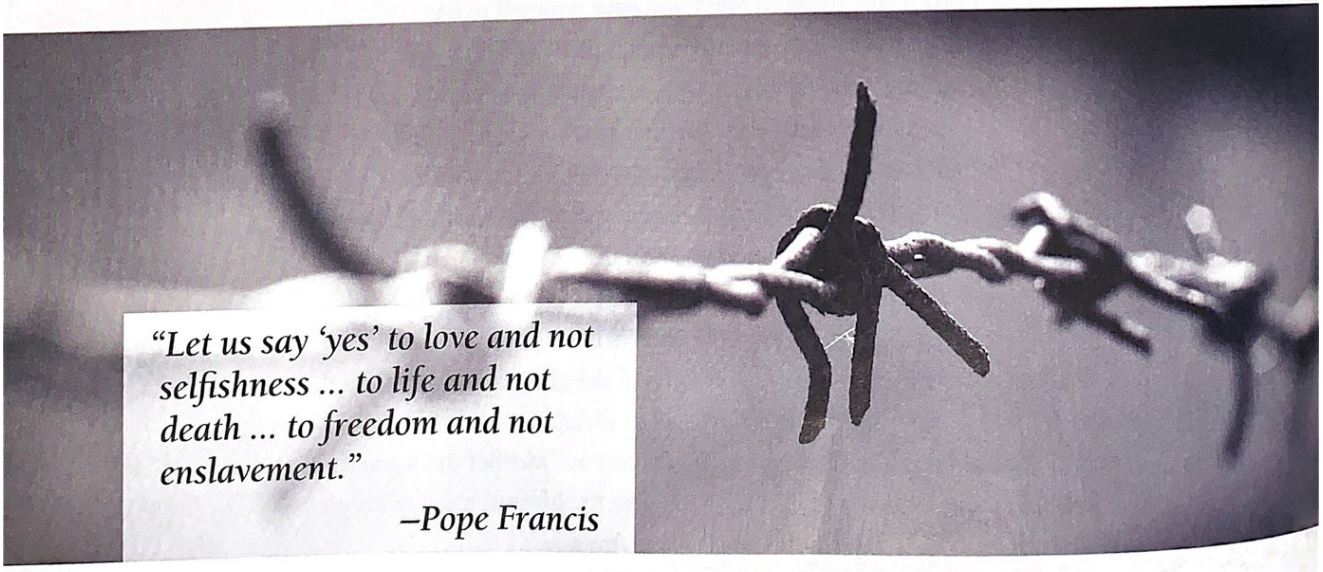
But he also knew that freedom doesn't consist in doing whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it. He fought communism in Eastern Europe throughout most of his life, particularly through his work with the Solidarity Movement. Yet he knew that a false sense of unbridled freedom brings its own kind of self-centered slavery.

When he landed in the United States, John Paul II was greeted by then-president Ronald Reagan, who embraced him and said, "Welcome to the land of the free!"

"Free!" John Paul II replied, "Yes! But free for what? Free for what?"

Freedom is more than the ability to do what you want. *It's the power to do what is good.* Real freedom isn't achieved through wealth, fame, or power; it's achieved by growing in virtue.

Today we're going to find out how.



"Let us say 'yes' to love and not selfishness ... to life and not death ... to freedom and not enslavement."

—Pope Francis

Hero of the Week



Born:

April 6, 1901

Died:

July 4, 1925

Memorial:

July 4

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

“Turn the other cheek, but go down swinging.”

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, the son of a wealthy newspaperman in Turin, Italy, was never looking for a fight, but he was not afraid to defend himself and his friends in the face of violence. During Church-organized demonstrations in Rome, he wielded a banner high and used the pole to fend off the blows of the opposition. Another time, when a group of angry fascists attacked his home, Pier Giorgio fought them off single-handedly—possibly saving his own life as well as his father’s.

Pier Giorgio was what we might call a regular guy with extraordinary holiness and passion for life ... an engineering student at the Royal Polytechnic University of Turin. A lover of music, art, and literature, he was also an avid mountain climber. He loved life, had great devotion to the Blessed Mother, and loved to share his faith with his friends, whom he frequently invited to attend Mass with him. He went to daily Mass and often stayed up all night in Adoration when other young men his age would have been out at parties.

His parents never quite understood the depth of his devotion to Christ. In fact, a lot of people misunderstood him. He often gave some or all of his bus or train fare to the poor ... sometimes forcing him to run home or to ride in a third-class train car. One of his friends asked

him why he rode in third class when he clearly could have afforded better. “Because there’s no fourth class,” he said. He lived very simply, although he came from a position of wealth and privilege. Pier Giorgio was the friend everyone wanted around because of his love of life and of his fellow man. And yet, he was also known among his friends as a man of prayer and devotion.

Pier Giorgio served the poor through various organizations such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He said, “Christ comes to me daily to visit me in the Holy Eucharist. I return the visit by going to visit him in the poor.”

His love of the poor and the impact of his personal connection with them became evident when he contracted polio and died at age twenty-four. The streets of Turin were lined with thousands of people who wanted to pay him homage at his funeral—most of them were the poor and needy that Pier had served! It was only then that much of his family learned of his life of extraordinary service. The cause for his canonization was brought forth by the poor of the city of Turin. At his beatification, St. John Paul II called him “the man of the eight beatitudes.”

Blessed Pier Giorgio, pray for us. Invest us with a selfless love of life and of our neighbor.